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It's a year to worry in Minden site — again Cleanup to cost \$704,000

By Dawn C. Wolfe

MINDEN — The process of removing PCBs from the dormant Shafter Equipment site continued Friday as workers clad in protective gear began removing contaminated soil.

The Environmental Protection Agency is spending \$704,750 to clean up 200 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated soil within the next few days, agency spokeswoman Carrie Dietzel said.

The EPA in December 1987 declared the Shafter site free of PCB after removing more than 4,700 tons of contaminated soil, but tests conducted in the spring show continued contamination.

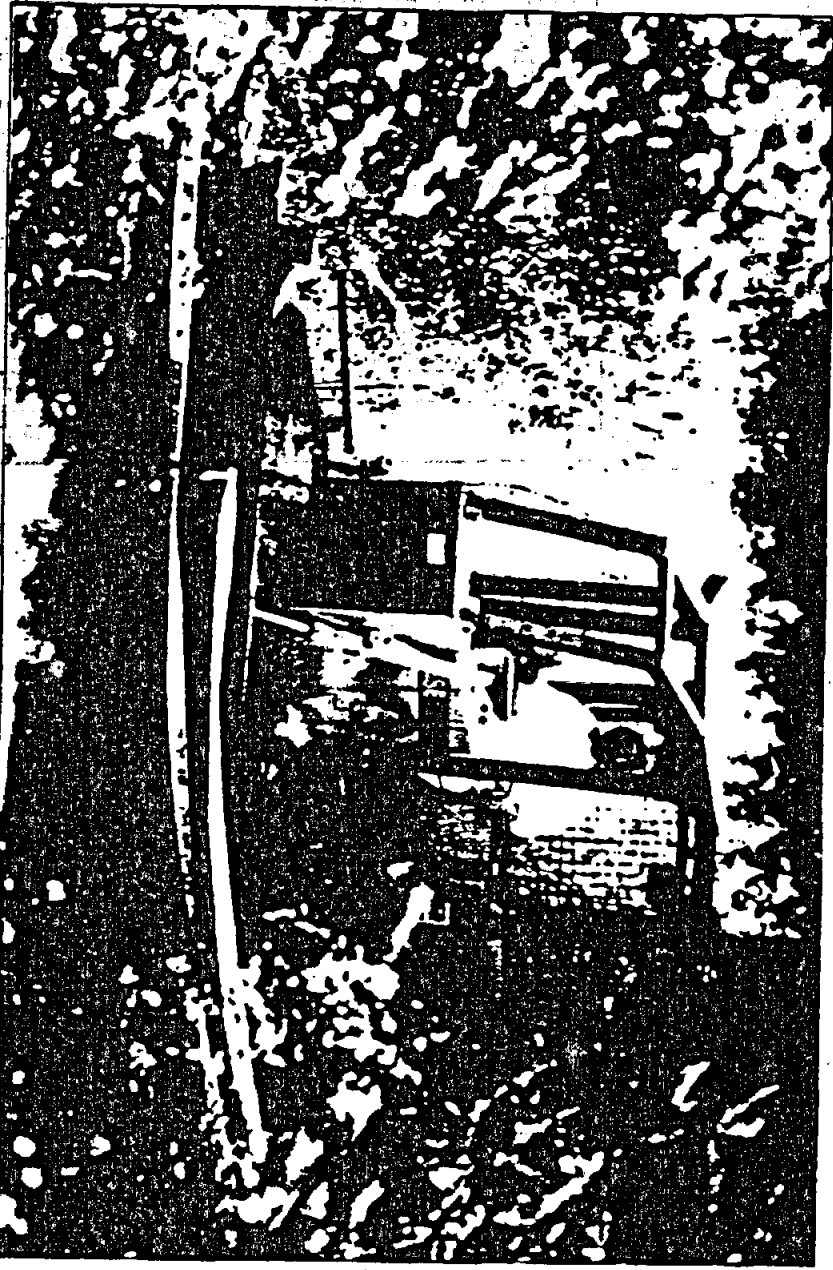
In addition to removing the contaminated soil, EPA also plans to do more testing and replace the excavated areas with clean fill, Dietzel said.

Work crews are excavating about six inches of soil in three areas on the plant site. The soil is being collected and then transferred to a dump site at the eastern end of the building until it can be disposed of in a few weeks.

To protect the area from further contamination, a waist-high pile of sand has been spread on the dump site. Over that are three layers of plastic liner.

The contaminated soil is being deposited on top of the liners and then wrapped in a water-proof fabric.

The soil will be tested and transferred to an authorized site, probably in Nevada or Utah, said Bob Caron, an on-scene coordinator with EPA.



An Environmental Protection Agency worker clad in protective clothing bulldozes an area of Minden contaminated with PCB.

The Register-Herald's Dawn Wolfe. The agency will do more testing and replace the cleared area with clean fill once the contaminated dirt is removed.

Not all residents worried about contamination

By Dawn C. Wolfe

MINDEN — The fall colors splashed in fiery hues of crimson and gold dot the mountains that cradle Minden.

In the distance, a trooper keeps repeating his song even though it's late in the afternoon. The parking lots at the post office and the town's only grocery store are filled to capacity with those running errands.

Most outsiders don't notice anything unusual about this Fayette County Community — until they visit the abandoned Shafter Equipment site.

The six-year-old "Dangerous Waste" signs and the plastic yellow "Do Not Cross" tape that winds around the plant warn visitors that an underlying problem in Minden isn't going to go away soon. That problem is polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCB.

Between 1984 and 1987, the

Environmental Protection Agency spent \$3 million to clean up the Shafter site.

The agency has hauled away more than 4,700 tons of PCB-contaminated dirt, 110 drums of contaminated liquids and solids, 23 drums of electric capacitors and 21 transformers from the site during that period.

Now they are back again to remove what is believed to be new contamination.

An industrial waste product,

PCB was also used as equipment insulators and coolants for equipment after being created in the 1890s. Suspected of causing cancer in humans, its use was banned by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1979.

For years, Shafter employees removed the oil from old electrical transformers they were rebuilding, burning some oil for heat, giving some to lo-

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cal residents to use in their furnaces, and dumping the rest in a pit.

PCB bonds to soil and are not water-soluble, meaning that any contaminated oil dumped on the ground 15 years ago could still present a health risk, some residents believe.

You can't see PCB, but it has a noticeably sweet odor—a smell some say is deceiving.

A citizens group known as the Concerned Citizens to Save Fayette County maintains some residents are suffering from adverse health problems possibly related to PCB exposure.

Others are skeptical that they're in jeopardy.

"I was born and raised here and I've got two children, but we don't have anything wrong with us," said Bonita Donelow, 32. "If I thought something was wrong, I'd leave."

Most of the people who worked at the Shaffer plant before it was shut down in 1983 have left Minden. Bonita Donelow points out that they did not flee because they're afraid of further risk. They needed to find new jobs, she said.

Another long-time resident tells the story of her grandfather, who died at age 77 after washing his hands in oil that

was drenched with PCB.

But Dell Sneed says her grandfather didn't die from exposure to the toxic chemical. He died of heart disease, an inherited trait in her family.

"Grandpa always used to tell us the stories about the mines and how they used to wash their hands in that oil," Sneed said. "But that was before they knew what PCB was."

Sneed doesn't believe the area is as contaminated as some say.

"I've lived here for 27 years and I'm not sick," she said. "I believe there are more skeptics than believers."

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